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BRIGANDAGE ON OUR RAILROADS.

BY THE HON. WADE HAMPTON, UNITED STATES COMMISSIONER
OF RAILROADS.

THE epidemic of train robbery seems to be spreading over the whole country, and no section appears to be safe from the attacks of the lawless desperadoes who commit this crime, and who, in many instances, add to their atrocities the crime of murder. Recently, in the near vicinity of the National Capital, one of the most daring and most successful of these robberies was committed and, but for the intelligent investigation of the detectives, the perpetrators would have escaped. In this alarming condition of affairs, any suggestion which, while calling attention to it, proposes any remedy may deserve the attention of the authorities and of the public. Every citizen is interested in the effort to break up this fearful crime, and especially those whose business or pleasure calls them to travel on the railroads. Nor is it alone the duty of the citizens to devote all aid in their power to prevent this crime and to punish the criminals, but it behooves the general government to take active and decisive steps in the same direction. That the government has authority to do this, I think is perfectly clear. No one will deny that it is the duty of the government to protect the lives and property of its citizens, to see that the transportation of the mails is unobstructed, and to guard against all violence that jeopardizes any of these objects. This being the case, it certainly is the duty of the government to take prompt and active measures to put a stop to these cowardly and murderous crimes, perpetrated by thieves and assassins.

Now what measures can be adopted which will best meet the ends desired? Recently there was a meeting held in New York, composed of many of the presidents of express companies, and

this body appealed to the government to take steps to protect the railroad trains. The opinion amongst these gentlemen was unanimous that the government should adopt measures by which the railroad robbers should be pursued and punished, and it was proposed to urge Congress to pass the bill presented by Representative Caldwell, of Illinois. As will be seen by the following sections of the bill, the chief object contemplated by it was to fix the punishment to be inflicted upon all persons guilty of robbing or interfering maliciously with any inter-state train. In order that your readers may see the main provisions of the proposed bill, the last two sections of it are here given :

That any person or persons who unlawfully and maliciously throws or causes anything to be thrown, or to fall into or upon or to strike against a railroad train, or an engine, tender, car, or truck, with intent to rob or injure a person or property on such train, engine, car, or truck engaged in inter-state commerce, shall, upon conviction, be imprisoned at hard labor not less than one year nor more than twenty years.

That the circuit and district courts of the United States are hereby invested with full and concurrent jurisdiction of all causes or crimes arising under any of the provisions of this act.

It will be observed that the bill looks to the punishment of the criminal chiefly, and not to the prevention of the crime, and while it is desirable that prompt and adequate punishment should be inflicted on the outlaws who commit these flagrant outrages, it is still more desirable that some means should be found to prevent a recurrence of them. Various plans have been suggested for the accomplishment of this end, but it seems that none of them has been successful. The railroad officials, as also the presidents of the express companies, appear to have come to the conclusion that armed guards on the trains are inefficient, if not useless; but it strikes me that the presence of even two determined men, properly armed, would add materially to the safety of passengers and train. Of course the expense attending the employment of a large force of armed men would be too great for any railroad to incur, and it would be impracticable for the government to furnish troops for the purpose of acting as guards. Our vast system of railroads covers too extensive a territory to be fully protected from robbery by any armed force which could be provided by the government or by the railroad companies, but something in that direction might be accomplished by the latter, in my opinion, and

as any suggestion which may evoke discussion on this question may prove of value, I venture to throw out one or two.

In all the cases of train robbery of which I have seen accounts, access to the express car has been attained by the robbers through the doors of the car. Accordingly, if these points of danger were adequately protected, the robbers might be foiled. An express car can be made invulnerable to firearms, and able to repel any attack save by the use of dynamite. If, therefore, every car had, in addition to its ordinary door, an independent one made of strong iron grating, which could remain closed should the outer door be broken in, any robber making an attack would be confronted with a serious obstacle in the shape of the iron door, should they succeed in forcing the outer one. Let every express company place one brave, determined man, in addition to the ordinary messenger, who should be of the same character, in the car, and let each be armed with a repeating shotgun, each carrying seven rounds of buckshot cartridges. Two brave men armed in this way would be a match for four times their number of men who, like these train robbers, are generally cowards. Should an attack be made on any express car, and the outer door be broken in, the first man showing himself in front of the iron grating could be shot down, while the men inside could be behind cover. A few such receptions to train robbers would bring the business into disrepute, and any of the perpetrators who would be killed would, in the judgment of all law-abiding citizens, have met a fate they richly deserved. There would be no difficulty in securing the services of proper messengers, and no more formidable firearms can be placed in the hands of such men than the weapon I have mentioned, for its seven loads can be discharged in a few seconds. This is the mere outline of a plan to protect trains, and perhaps modifications of it can be made judiciously; but I feel assured that by a comparatively moderate outlay the express companies could make their cars almost, if not quite, unassailable.

In addition to the means of protection already suggested, let me mention another, and that is the use of dogs trained to follow men; and while on this subject let me correct a misapprehension prevalent throughout the North, that these dogs are bloodhounds. I doubt if there are half a dozen bloodhounds in the United States, or that any has ever been used in the pursuit of fugitives, except in the fable of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The

dogs used are the ordinary foxhounds ; these will follow a trail, but they will not attack the fugitive. They only indicate his route of flight, so that parties following on horseback can come up with him. Most of the penitentiaries in the South keep these dogs, as do the managers of convict farms and camps. The Cuban bloodhound is a fierce, intractable dog, and I have never known of its use in pursuing a fugitive, nor are they useful as hunting-dogs. The English bloodhound, on the contrary, is a noble dog, gentle, sagacious, and affectionate. In the famous picture by Landseer, called "Dignity and Impudence," he is well portrayed, and though it is said that in the olden time he was used in England to track human beings, he is now not called on for that purpose. Your readers are doubtless familiar with Walter Scott's story of the pursuit of Sir William Wallace by one of these dogs, and the manner in which he escaped. I have used both the Cuban and the English bloodhound in hunting, and, while the former was generally worthless for this purpose, the latter was valuable. The hounds now used for tracking men, when properly trained, will take and follow a trail twenty-four hours old, and in some cases even a colder one. If, in those parts of the country where robberies of trains occur most frequently, a couple of good dogs could be kept at each of certain selected stations, even if the distance between such points were hundreds of miles, whenever a train is held up the dogs could be summoned by wire and in a few hours they would be on the trail of the robbers. The expense entailed on the railroad companies in carrying out this plan would be comparatively light, and the experiment might prove a success. The whole country is interested in breaking up this fearful crime of train robbery, and any suggestions which would tend to that end are worthy of consideration.

WADE HAMPTON.